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# ANALYSIS

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## SUBJECTIVISM AND THE EMPIRICISTS

By P. H. NOWELL-SMITH

AN empiricist is one who subscribes to either or both the principles that propositions can only be confirmed or invalidated by experience, and that all concepts are derived from experience. I choose this definition because these principles, in one form or another, have been held by all the philosophers traditionally called empiricists. By the term "Subjectivist" I mean anyone who maintains either a sceptical or an agnostic attitude either to the existence of the external world or to the existence of other minds. The term is therefore an extremely vague one and correspondingly wide in its denotation; it will cover all forms of idealism, agnosticism and old-fashioned positivism. It is hard to find clear formulations of this type of view; but it is characteristic of those philosophers that Lenin called "Empirio-critics" and of all those who assert that material objects are "permanent possibilities of sensation", "complexes of sense-data", or "logical constructions out of sense-data".

Historically there has been an intimate connection between empiricist method and subjectivist conclusion. Opponents of subjectivism have always considered the refutation of empiricism a necessary and sufficient condition of the refutation of their real enemy, and empiricists have repeatedly devoted themselves to the task of 'saving themselves' from unpalatable and emotionally objectionable subjectivist consequences. The history of epistemology since Descartes and Locke has been the history of the attempt to set the sails of empiricism as near the wind of subjectivism as the philosopher dares, and a large part of the

alleged discrepancy between philosophy and everyday life derives from precisely this issue.<sup>1</sup>

Now if we continue to believe that Hume's dilemma is a real one and that empiricist principles are at least *liable* to lead to subjectivist conclusions, no amount of argument is going to convince more than a handful of eccentric philosophers that the principles of empiricism are not radically incorrect; and even their convictions will be quickly dispelled when they leave the reveries of their chambers for contact with the outside world. For subjectivism is rightly held to be incompatible with most of the propositions of science, ethics and common-sense to which we most tenaciously adhere. It is even not uncommon to find 'scientific' arguments that indicate the temporal priority of matter to mind advanced to prove the falsity of philosophical subjectivism; and the fact that such arguments can easily be refuted, on the grounds that the evidence they adduce contains reference to precisely those objects of which they purport to prove the independent existence, detracts in no way from the conviction they carry.

It is my purpose to show that, so far from implying any disreputable subjectivist consequences, empiricism is logically incompatible with such consequences, and later to give some account of the genesis of the prevailing, and, I believe, false view. This must be done not by examining the actual arguments by which empiricists appear to reach subjectivist conclusions, but by investigating the *kind* of argument that they use and the *kind* of conclusion that such arguments, according to their avowed principles, can establish.

The arguments commonly employed are of two kinds. Locke and Hume argue *a posteriori* from particular experiments, Berkeley argues *a priori* from the nature of the terms involved; and it is his arguments that are commonly considered to merit the closest attention. Berkeley adduces not one shred of empirical evidence against the existence of material substance; and yet, on his own showing, empirical evidence is the only criterion of the truth of existential propositions. Manifestly his method is in no way comparable to that of a man who might seek to determine whether or not centaurs exist. His arguments claim to prove, not that material substance *might* exist but *in*

Cf. D. Hume, *Treatise*, Appendix to the third book. *Everyman* edition, p. 319.

*fact* does not, but that the very concept of material substance is impossible. Now to say that a concept is impossible is to say that a certain word (or phrase), namely that which purports to mean that concept, is in fact meaningless. Berkeley cannot refute the hypothesis that material substance exists, because a meaningful hypothesis cannot be refuted *a priori*. But he can, perhaps, show that in certain contexts (i.e. as used on certain specific occasions) the words 'material substance' are meaningless, and, in consequence, that the alleged hypothesis is not an hypothesis at all. He might show, for instance that certain sentences that someone thought expressed propositions in fact expressed contradictions. If this is so, then the kind of argument by which empiricists are often said to reach subjectivist conclusions cannot possibly lead to such conclusions. To rule out certain occurrences of a phrase as meaningless or to show that a certain sentence expresses a contradiction cannot possibly be to show that such and such an *entity* cannot exist. For the question whether a particular object exists or not is one that, for an empiricist at least, must be decided *a posteriori*, so long as the hypothesis that it exists is meaningful; and the meaningfulness of an hypothesis is a purely internal characteristic that can be guaranteed by the exercise of sufficient discrimination in the choice of its terms. The unpleasant feeling, therefore, that empiricist philosophies often give us of having *ruled out* the possibility of certain types of object that are not without sentimental value is always unjustified—unless we have a hankering after round squares or prime numbers between thirteen and seventeen.<sup>2</sup> If it is characteristic of a subjectivist or agnostic to pronounce *a priori* on the hypothesis that such and such an entity exists, then such persons implicitly deny the canons of empiricism. To put the same conclusion in another form: All existential propositions must be, for an empiricist, synthetic. The subjectivist who denies that the material world or other minds exist, must be denying a meaningful proposition. This he cannot do *a priori* if he is an empiricist. I am not concerned to refute subjectivism, merely to point out that it is incompatible with empiricism.

The other type of argument is that which attempts to demonstrate by experiment the dependence of physical objects on the sense-organs of a percipient. These arguments are capable

<sup>2</sup>Cf. M. Schlick, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, p. 149.

of a great variety of interpretations and they lead to a great variety of conclusions. But whatever they prove is proved for the percipient's body as well as for other physical objects. It is not only a candle-flame that appears double when I press my eyeball ; my hand also does ; and, if I happen to be looking in a mirror at the time, so do my eyes ! All our senses are not active all the time, and these arguments, so far from proving the dependence of external objects on the percipient's body, merely reveal certain correlations between the physical objects called ' my sense-organs ' and certain other physical objects. These correlations are exactly analogous to those that have been observed between thunder and lightning. If anyone likes to assert that lightning is a ' logical construction out of sense-data ' or a ' mere idea in the mind ', let him by all means do so ; but he should in fairness apply the same honorific or derogatory titles to his own sense-organs. Furthermore he is not entitled to assert, on the basis of his or any other known experiments, that his sense-organs were prior *in time* to all pieces of inorganic matter. For the philosophical analysis of a concept cannot tend to establish anything about the occurrence of particular events in space and time, and all the evidence that scientists have so far been able to discover points in the opposite direction.

These remarks are not intended to throw any light on the traditional problems of mind and matter, the reality of the external world, or our knowledge of other minds. They indicate merely that these problems are not to be solved by question-begging definitions. Nor can they be solved empirically ; for manifestly philosophers are not seeking to validate any *particular* proposition about physical objects, historical events, or other minds, but to discover how *all* such propositions are to be interpreted, and incidentally to discover what sort of a process ' validating a proposition ' is. Herein lies the difference between metaphysics and epistemology on the one hand and natural science on the other. Idealists and Realists do not quarrel about the truth of the theory of Relativity or the Nebular Hypothesis ; as metaphysicians they are not concerned with the arguments adduced by geologists or palaeontologists in support of their conclusions. What they dispute is the *meaning* or *interpretation* of these conclusions. And when they ask what a certain scientific proposition means, they are not asking for an explanation of it

in terms of the other propositions of that science ; they are asking for a *complete translation* of all the propositions of that science into propositions about 'sense-data', 'physical objects', 'the Absolute' or whatever metaphysical concepts happen to take their fancy. It is because they are concerned with meaning and definition rather than with truth that they argue *a priori*. } G.P.

But their demand rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of explanation and definition. To explain a phenomenon is to relate it to other phenomena ; to define a term is to exhibit its relations to other terms, and to give the meaning of a proposition is to translate it into other propositions. Now it happens not infrequently that the fundamental concepts of one branch of science can be defined in terms of the concepts of another branch. The history of physics contains many examples of this process of generalization, and progress in science consists in reducing the more specific to the more general, in correlating hitherto isolated phenomena or groups of phenomena with other groups. There are no theoretical limits to this process, and a single unified science has often been the goal of philosophical endeavour. But if explanation consists in relating a part to the whole or to other parts, there can be no such thing as an explanation of the whole universe, and that is the type of explanation that a metaphysician claims to give. Furthermore, as C. S. Peirce pointed out, since universes are not as plentiful as blackberries, it is hard to see what sort of form such an explanation would take.

The purpose of empiricist principles is to give a criterion of meaning, not to discover particular truths ; it is therefore purely pragmatic. Language is a medium of communication, an instrument ; and as such it can be more or less efficient. The empiricist is attempting to increase its efficiency by the elimination of unnecessary matter. The function of the laws of logic in this respect is sufficiently obvious. But even when the laws of logic are satisfied there will obviously be an infinite number of possible ways of classifying, describing and predicting phenomena ; and these are the only functions of significant speech. Now every empiricist criterion has been devised to eliminate unnecessary symbols. Most of these criteria have taken the form of eliminating all terms that cannot be reduced to the names of qualities that are immediately observable. If this implies translating all sentences into sentences about private

'sense-data', it will lead to the curious result that the language that it was designed to safeguard from nonsense ceases to be a medium of communication at all. In the course of eliminating unnecessary symbols we seem to have eliminated symbols altogether. But there is no reason to believe that immediate observability is the only criterion of meaning, or even a good one. So long as we can indicate the circumstances under which a symbol is to be used, there is no possible objection to our using it. There can be no *a priori* objection to a description of the world in terms of sense-data, material substance, the Absolute, or any other metaphysical concepts. Our choice is limited by two considerations alone, logical consistency and convenience. Whenever, therefore, a new concept is proposed, in terms of which we are asked to describe our experience, it is always relevant to ask, first whether the proposed description is logically consistent, and secondly, whether it is likely to be more fruitful than any description already available.

The more general the application of the proposed new concept is to be, the more necessary will it be to give some indication of its use; but nothing is gained by calling relatively general concepts 'formal' and relatively specific concepts 'material' and distinguishing sharply between them. Undoubtedly concepts such as 'entity', 'force', 'number' and 'cause' are more abstract than 'colour', 'shape', and 'vice'; and these again are more abstract than 'blue', 'oblong' and 'hypocrisy'. But 'formal' concepts are in no sense meaningless, nor do the criteria for specifying their meanings differ in any aspect from those which are appropriate to 'material' concepts. The aura of suspicion that (rightly) surrounds so-called metaphysical concepts is due not to any meaninglessness inherent in them—the very supposition is itself meaningless—but to the unwillingness of those who employ them to give any criterion for their use at all, and to the fact that, by and large, descriptions of the world in such terms have not been very fruitful.

A single example, and one that is intimately connected with our subject, must suffice to illustrate the consequences of a misunderstanding of the use of language in definition and translation. We noticed that all philosophers who adopt the principles of empiricism are apparently faced with the problem of defining the concepts of our public language in terms of an experience



that is *ex hypothesi* private. (Though no-one, so far as I am aware, has given any indication of what it means to call an experience private, with its implied corollary that an experience could be public. Let it suffice that the empiricist tradition maintains that all experience is private and that no sentence is meaningful unless it can be translated into terms of experience.) This process is variously called 'transcending the given', 'escaping from the solipsism of the present moment', 'constructing our common world', etc., etc. Its clearest manifestation is in the works of those philosophers who believe that physical objects are 'logical constructions out of sense-data', and that it is the duty of the philosopher to translate all sentences containing reference to logical constructions into sentences containing their expanded equivalents.<sup>3</sup> These philosophers maintain that all reference to tables, cats, electrons, stellar parallaxes, the Subconscious and so on can 'in principle' be translated into sentences that refer only to colours, sounds and smells.<sup>4</sup> Now if this theory is correct, it follows from the nature of definition that the sentences containing 'public' terms are mere notational abbreviations for sentences containing only private terms, and it is easy to see how the accusation of subjectivism comes to be made against philosophers who are forced into holding this type of view.

The theory that it is our duty to effect this type of translation is open to numerous objections. Aside from the difficulty of carrying out the actual reductions, of reducing electrons to

<sup>3</sup>Carnap's *Logische Aufbau der Welt* and Wisdom's articles entitled *Logical constructions in Mind*, vols. LV-LVII, are the best examples of the attempt to carry out such reductions. It is, perhaps, significant that both these philosophers have abandoned this point of view in their more recent writings. Mr. Wisdom's view seems to be substantially similar to my own, and I am much indebted to his article entitled *Philosophical Perplexity* in the Aristotelian Society's Proceedings for 1936-7.

<sup>4</sup>Some of these examples have been chosen because they are entities that are not even in principle observable, e.g. electrons and the subconscious. But philosophers have not always been clear about what they mean by 'observable'. What, for instance, do they mean when they say 'You cannot see (observe) a table, only a sense-datum that belongs to a table'? Are they denying that a conversation such as the following is intelligible to English-speaking people? 'Couldn't you see the table?' 'No, it was too dark. But John's eyes are better than mine, and he saw it.' The philosopher will reply that he is not using 'see' in that sense. But he ought to remember that it is a syllable to which considerable conventional meaning is attached that he is using; and if he wants to give it a new meaning he ought to warn us. Moreover, if *he* is inventing a new term, it is for him to define its usage and to say, among other things whether it can take 'table' for an object. In general it is better to make verifiability rather than observability the criterion of meaning. For propositions about electrons can be directly verified; that is to say, we can give a criterion for deciding when such a proposition is true and when it is false.

pointer-readings and pointer-readings to patterns in a visual field and so on, there is the far more fundamental objection that the whole procedure rests on a misapprehension of the function of language<sup>5</sup>; for language is essentially an instrument for communication, and a language that consists entirely of private terms hardly seems to be a language at all. Consequently it cannot be the business of anyone, least of all a philosopher, to translate the sentences of our common speech into sentences that are *ex hypothesi* intelligible to nobody but himself.

I do not mean to deny altogether the value of analysis in philosophy. This process often reveals relations between terms that have not hitherto been perceived, the resulting definitions are often of the greatest value. It is only when we try to analyze the terms used in English or any other current language (or, for the matter of that, any new language that someone might propose for its logical simplicity or other virtues), into terms that cannot be said to be symbols at all, that we embark on a wild goose chase. The need for translation arises when we are faced with a new or unfamiliar concept, or when we want to clarify our minds about some concept that is familiar but still puzzling. Philosophers are fond of asking such questions as 'What is a physical object?', 'What is another mind?' Sometimes these questions take the form, 'Are there other minds?' or more strongly 'Are there *really* physical objects?' Such questions must either be requests for the definition of a hitherto unknown word or requests for information about an object of which we know something already. Now, if they belong to the latter class, then, *according to the empiricist*, they can only be answered by observation of the behaviour of the object concerned. If to the former, then they can only be answered by reference to a dictionary (the source of all our *a priori* knowledge). I do not wish to imply that these are the only sources of information available to us. No doubt some of us have *a priori* intuitions, and others have divine revelations. But, for the empiricist,

<sup>5</sup>I sometimes suspect that philosophers who attempt these reductions are trying to establish correlations between facts or events that belong to *perception* and facts or events that belong to—say—physics. But perception cannot be studied *a priori* any more than anatomy can. Sense-organs are physical objects (whatever that may mean). If sensing, perceiving, observing, etc., are activities, like running and jumping, then we cannot base criteria of meaning upon them. And it is hard to see what else they can be. When words such as 'experience' 'observation', etc., are used in the formulation of philosophical principles, they always seem to violate those principles.



*tertium non datur*. Now some dictionary definitions are illuminating and some are not ; that is because some lexicographers are clever men and others are not. Similarly some accounts of the behaviour of objects are clear, concise and easily remembered. These have a great practical advantage over those that are cumbersome and verbose, and the main objects of philosophical analysis are to unfold the logical relations between terms that actually exist in our language and to simplify and purify that language with a view to making it a more serviceable medium of communication.

The tools of analysis are two-fold, logical and methodological. Their functions and, as it were, authority are very different. For, while the rules of logic determine from the form of an expression alone whether or not it can be a meaningful symbol in a given language, the principles of empiricism have no such legislative force. Rules such as 'Occam's Razor' or the notorious 'Principle of Verification' cannot determine what can or cannot happen any more than the laws of logic can. We cannot, that is to say, draw any empirical conclusions from them; and sentences such as 'You cannot see tables, only sense-data belonging to tables' are not legitimate statements of fact. Yet there is an important difference in status between the laws of logic and the principles of empiricism. It is not nonsense to say that a table is 'nothing but a group of sense-data' as it is nonsense to say that it is 'a wooden object not made of wood,' though both statements are, of course, equally unverifiable. The difference lies in the fact that the latter can never even be a useful sentence,<sup>6</sup> whereas the former may introduce us to a valuable new concept, and has at least the right to be given a hearing. In short, while the principles of logic can save us from the use of symbols which are useless because they contravene the fundamental rules of our language, those of empiricism serve merely to rule out symbols that are cumbersome, unnecessary or otherwise ill-adapted to their purpose. That 'Unnecessary elements in a symbolism mean nothing' has been given as an explanation of the meaning of 'Occam's razor'. Peirce expresses the same idea when he says that there can be no possible difference

<sup>6</sup> 'I do not deny that tautologies can sometimes be charged with significance. Compare "A man's a man for a' that" and "Business is Business". But the form of such expressions is misleading.

<sup>7</sup> L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus* 5.4732.

in theory (i.e. in symbolism) where there is no difference in practice. If we limit our use of the principles of empiricism to their legitimate pragmatic function, they cannot possibly lead either to subjectivism or to any other metaphysical theory since they lead inevitably to a denial of the possibility of metaphysical theories altogether, if such theories are what we have held them to be.

*Note.* Mr. Ryle<sup>a</sup> claims to prove that it is illegitimate to refer to empirical persons in formulating the criterion of verifiability. If the words 'I' and 'mine' are to have any meaning at all it can never be a tautology to say that such and such an experience was mine. 'There was a tooth-ache at 10 o'clock' cannot be by definition synonymous with 'I had a tooth-ache at ten o'clock'; and 'that tooth-ache was mine and not yours' will always be a synthetic proposition. That a skittle-pin is upsettable by a skittle-ball may be analytic, but that this stick is a skittle-pin and therefore, *inter alia*, upsettable by a skittle-ball is a synthetic proposition.

That 'belonging to me' is a causal property and that therefore 'X belongs to me' will always be synthetic is satisfactorily demonstrated by Mr. Ryle, but the ingenious solipsist is not altogether driven from the field. In the first place, at most he is compelled to admit the meaningfulness of the hypothesis that there are other minds. For if he is not allowed to define tooth-ache and 'my toothache' so that they become synonymous he can at least invent a word, say 'mooth-ache', for my tooth-ache and claim that while he has plenty of evidence for the existence of mooth-aches he has none for tooth-aches and 'tooth-ache' is for him as meaningless a word as 'brillig' or 'tove.' But he is not, I think, even compelled to admit this.

Let us limit the terms 'mine' and 'yours' to their legitimate empirical occurrences. Of any physical object such as a book, a hand, or an eye, it will be sense to say that it is mine or yours. But instead of proving that every introspectible datum is mine and that every sense-datum is mine (in the sense 'had-by-me' rather than 'belonging-to-me') the new theory will hold that the term 'mine' cannot be applied to introspectible data at all and that 'had-by-me' is not an empirical relation at all; and

<sup>a</sup> Unverifiability-by-me', *Analysis* 4. 1.

consequently that the phrase 'had-by-me' can be given no meaning in this context. It will turn out that, while books and hands and eyes stand in the observable relation called 'belonging to' which involves their occurrence in easily recognizable groups called 'persons' or in some easily specifiable relation to such a group, anger and pleasure and other introspectible states do not behave like that. We shall have to distinguish between anger- and pleasure-*symptoms* which are visible and audible and which can be said to 'belong to' me or to Smith or to Jones, and anger- and pleasure-*feelings* to which the notion of belonging apparently cannot apply. For instance 'Jones and I were both angry' will have to mean 'there were anger-symptoms belonging to Jones and there were anger-feelings.' 'I was angry' is systematically ambiguous in English. For it means either 'There were anger-feelings' or 'there were anger-symptoms belonging to me'. These two meanings are not, of course, necessarily connected; one can sham. But there are empirical correlations of a high degree between them, and that is why we happen to have the same form of words 'I was angry' for both.

Similarly 'Jones and I have the same political opinions' will mean 'Whenever there is a political proposition, then either there are annoyance-symptoms belonging to Jones and there are annoyance-feelings, or there are pleasure-symptoms belonging to Jones and there are pleasure-feelings.' We must, of course avoid saying 'Whenever I hear a political proposition . . .', or 'I have anger feelings'; for empirical persons do not hear or have feelings at all.

It is not easy to determine what sort of a 'cannot' is being used in such propositions as 'Feelings cannot be said to "belong to" a person'. But compare 'Sounds cannot be seen', 'Virtue cannot be triangular' and 'Smith cannot be a proposition'.

It would seem that this sort of theory must be held by every whole-hogging verificationist, since it is certain that feelings can never be observed to belong to other persons and they are only said to belong to me because of the close correlation in experience between feelings and 'my' symptoms. While it reveals many sets of symptoms, experience apparently reveals only one set of data in general (compare Kant's Unity of Apperception). So that, while the theory refuted by Ryle made the mistake of calling this single set of data 'mine', the new theory denies that

the category of 'meum' and 'tuum' is applicable to sensing or feeling at all.

Now this theory seems *prima facie* as paradoxical as the old; and the paradox lies not in denying that we can be directly acquainted with other people's experience (nobody having given any clear account of what such an activity would be); nor in asserting that all experience is mine (for we have shown that no empiricist could hold this *a priori*, and that there can be no evidence for it); but in denying the possibility of referring experience to particular persons at all. That this denial is a logical consequence of empiricism can be made clear by pointing out that 'having an experience' is not an observable process at all. If language is limited, as it appears to be by the adoption of an empiricist criterion of sense, to reporting the behaviour of empirical entities, then, though there will still be colours and sounds and emotions, there will be no sensing or feeling. On the other hand we don't want to hold a theory that prevents us from talking about other people's tooth-aches, and, as I think I showed in the first part of my paper, the principles of empiricism cannot lead to the refutation of any meaningful hypothesis *a priori*. There is therefore an inconsistency that I cannot as yet resolve, and I see little hope of doing so. Perhaps what is needed is an explanation of the nature of philosophical analysis, and if the second half of my paper is anything like true, there is no such animile!

## FUNCTIONAL VARIABILITY OF ETHICAL RULES

BY ABRAHAM EDEL

THE traditional struggle concerning the intuitive or empirical character of ethical rules such as "Lying is wrong" cannot expect a solution less complex than that of similar controversies concerning mathematical statements. The difficulties involved are common ones—the use of a single linguistic form to cover a variety of logically different purposes. Short of symbolic devices or standardizations to mark an ethical sentence as analytic statement, empirical statement, or resolution, there is no other way but questioning of intention and observation of usage, to discover what is intended. Take, for example, the assertion "Such-and-such is wrong." It may be any one of the following types :

1. ANALYTIC. It may be analytic in one of at least three ways which may be illustrated thus :

(a) "Murder is wrong." Here, in spite of attempts to give a descriptive account of murder, it turns out in common usage frequently to mean wrong deliberate killing. The assertion is therefore equivalent to "Wrong deliberate killing is wrong."

(b) "To prefer a lesser good for oneself rather than a greater good for another is wrong." Here wrong has probably been defined as leading to a lesser total good, and good is taken as a quality of discoverable magnitude regardless of its relation to specific persons. Hence the assertion is a theorem in a presupposed system.

(c) "It is wrong to do unto others without justification what you would not have done unto yourself." Since the content of the justification is undetermined, self-love is not excluded. The statement is thus merely a special case of the logical rule that different reasons are needed logically to produce contrary results. If  $p$  and  $q$  are consistent statements and imply  $r$ , then  $p$  and  $q$  do not imply a contradictory or contrary of  $r$ .

2. EMPIRICAL. Thus "Lying is wrong" may be intended to mean (a) "All lies are wrong" or (b) "Most lies are wrong."<sup>1</sup> As empirical statements both assert the universal or for-the-most-

<sup>1</sup> An ambiguity likewise lurks in the singular statement "This lie is wrong," i.e., either "This act is a lie and this act is wrong" or "This act, insofar as it is a lie, is wrong." The second implies "Lying is wrong" in sense (a) or (b).

part correlation of "being a lie" and "being wrong" where independent interpretations of the two are supplied. There is here a possible ambiguity in the term "wrong" whatever be taken as its interpretation. Taking it most widely as referring to an unspecified negative value in some process of evaluation, "All lies are wrong" may mean (i) a lie always *contributes* a negative value to be balanced with other values in the total evaluation of an act (the total resultant of such reckoning may even turn out positive); or (ii) a lie always guarantees that the final result of the reckoning will yield a negative value. If meaning (i) be taken, then a justifiable lie (one yielding a positive value surplus for the whole individual act) does not contradict the assertion "All lies are wrong." To think it does is to commit the traditional "fallacy of accident." If meaning (ii) be taken, a single exception will destroy the universal. In either case the statement requires empirical confirmation, in the first by discovering a universal value-diminishing power of a lie, in the second by discovering an absolutely contaminating power. For illustration of the first take the common attitude to killing; for the second, the Victorian attitude towards in chastity, or the extreme pacifist's attitude towards killing. Professor Moore's principle of organic unities points out a disturbing factor in actual reckonings, and it may be that for most kinds of action for most people the universal form should give way to the for-the-most-part form.

3. RESOLUTIONS. This term covers nominal definitions co-ordinating definitions, and other conventions.

(a) In those writers who provide no independent interpretation for "wrong," a statement such as "What is contrary to social interests is wrong" may be taken as a nominal definition of "wrong."

(b) Co-ordinating definitions are seldom explicit since the operations interpreting ethical terms are by no means clear. "Whatever repels conscience (or the moral sense) is wrong," is an approach to this type of definition since it correlates the symbol "wrong" with a supposedly known and introspectively ascertainable act. In one sense Kant's account of "wrong" follows the same part; it suggests as the "measuring" operation that you attempt to universalize the maxim of your action (i.e., will that everyone else should act on it) and find yourself unready so to will.



(c) If "Killing is wrong" is taken to be neither a definition nor an empirical statement, can it be anything else? We may look for a suggestion in the possible transformation of an empirical sentence, as it functions in the ethical process. Suppose we begin with "All killing is wrong," interpreting "wrong" as value-diminishing, not value-destroying. Suppose the statement to receive considerable empirical confirmation. We may go on to deduce from it that if a situation involving killing has a total positive evaluation, there must be some exceptional value involved to counterbalance the killing, e.g., as in self-defence or defending one's country against aggression, etc. Suppose now that a people whose culture we have not studied is found to attach a high positive value to many situations in which killing occurs. Extrapolating, we would predict the discovery of some pervasive exceptional additional value. Suppose further that on examination no such additional value is found. If the statement "All killing is wrong" is to be saved, we must *postulate* such an additional value. We might thus say that it exists though undiscovered, or even that the act of killing is itself the exceptional value. Thus paradoxically we would save the position that killing always contributes a negative value by assuming that it also contributes in a special case a positive value. Obviously the assumption that killing is universally wrong would be protected by such procedures from refutation, and its use for any length of time or over a wide field in this way would involve a conventional element; that is, it would be employed to conserve its ordering value in the description of other cultures than the exceptional one, and to maintain a system of generalizations. Of course there might always be the hope of restoring its empirical status by finding an interpretation of the paradoxical case, e.g., a lesser strain of remorse together with a greater strain of rejoicing in the killing.

There is another sense in which a principle might be called a convention or resolution—when a group is determined that the principle shall adequately describe their reactions. Thus a group of pacifists might be resolved that killing be wrong; that is, whatever the interpretation of negative value, they might guide their conduct in such a way and so fashion themselves as to produce sincerely the requisite abhorrence reaction. In this matter the basic fact is the plasticity of human material. All

ultimate values have this character, Such "conventions" or "resolutions" may (and do), of course, undergo change, just as scientific conventions may. In science it would involve eventually rewriting the system; in ethics, refashioning taste and character. Both are historically observable and historically explicable processes, and both are capable of psychological description, such as, that certain scientists employed certain conventions, or that certain groups behaved on certain principles.

It is an implied suggestion, in what has been said above, that the strength of ethical intuitionism lay in its representation, in spite of gross misunderstanding, of the non-empirical functions of some ethical rules.

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#### COUNCIL FOR ASSISTING REFUGEE PHILOSOPHERS

An organisation has been established under this name for the assistance of philosophers who are seeking refuge in this country from racial or political persecution. The inaugural meeting was attended by representatives of the Aristotelian Society, the British Institute of Philosophy, the Mind Association, the Analysis Society, the Philosophical Society of England, the Scots Philosophical Club, the Senior Division of the Cambridge Moral Science Club, and the Oxford Philosophical Society: and it is proposed that the Council shall consist of representatives of these and other societies, and of coopted representatives of institutions where philosophy is studied.

The officers of the Council are Viscount Samuel, President; Professor John Macmurray, Chairman of Executive Committee; and Dr. C. A. Mace, Bedford College, N.W.1, Honorary Secretary.

Plans are being worked out in close collaboration with the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning, and details will shortly be announced. A meeting for discussion of the Council's work will be held during the Joint Session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association at Edinburgh in July. In the meantime those interested are invited to communicate with the Honorary Secretary.

